

62 U09 Nolan at Balaklava : Part XII: Colonel Trochu's Account of the Battle of Balaklava

by Dr Douglas J Austin U 09



Trochu (CDV: 1870?)



General Trochu, from *The Graphic*

Louis-Jules Trochu (1815-1896) is significant in French military and political history. He was educated at St Cyr, received a commission in the Staff Corps in 1837, and was promoted Lieutenant in 1840 and Captain in 1843. He served as a Captain in Algeria under Marshal Bugeaud, who, in recognition of his gallantry in the battles of Sidi Yussuf and Isly, made him his Aide-de-Camp and entrusted him with important commissions. He was promoted Major in 1845, and Colonel in 1853.

He served with distinction throughout the Crimean campaign as Chief Aide-de-Camp successively to Marshal St Arnaud, General Canrobert and General Pelissier - then as a General of Brigade - and was made a Commander of the Legion of Honour and General of Division. Thanks to Dr Jill Armitage, we now have more information on Trochu in the Crimea. In her article (This Journal (34),1, p41, 2016) entitled "*Edward Armitage RA (1817-1896): Crimean War Artist*" she reported that Edward Armitage RA produced a number of Crimean sketches and provided a description of the friendly circumstances under which he obtained these sketches - in a letter he wrote to "*The Graphic*" in 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War. '*The accompanying sketch of General Trochu was taken in the Crimea early in 1855*'. '*The general was the head of Canrobert's Staff. He was extremely kind to me, placed me next to him at the officers' mess table, and hearing I was fond of chess invited me to his tent. The sketch was taken during the interval of the moves.*' He went on to describe his initial impressions of the General: '*What pleased me particularly about him was the total absence of military swagger too common even in those early days of the Empire amongst French officers. Quiet, unaffected, and even homely in appearance, he gave one more the idea of a respectable National Guard than of a Napoleonic general. His conversation was that of a refined and well-educated gentleman. He did not (as was the fashion with many of our own officers) avoid military topics, nor did he, like Canrobert, Pelissier, and other African generals, talk nothing but shop.*' At pains to distance his sketch from more recent photographs of the General, Armitage continued, '*The sketch I send you, though very unlike the modern photographs of General Trochu, was considered by his brother officers in the Crimea to be a good and characteristic portrait. 'C'est bien ça le bonhomme Trochu', was a remark made more than once on examining the contents of my sketch-book.*'

Trochu again distinguished himself in command of a division in the Italian campaign of 1859, when he won the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour. In 1866 he was employed at the ministry of war in the preparation of army reorganization schemes, and he published anonymously "*L'Armée Française en 1867*", a work inspired with Orleanist sentiment, which ran through ten editions in a few months and reached a twentieth in 1870. This brought him into bad odour at court, and he left the war office on half-pay. He was refused a field command at the outbreak of the Franco-German War. After the earlier disasters in 1870, he was appointed by Napoleon III first as Commandant of the troops of the Châlons camp, and soon afterwards (17th August) as Governor of Paris and Commander-in-Chief of all the forces destined for the defence of the capital. He worked energetically to put Paris in a state of defence and throughout the siege showed himself a master of the passive defensive. At the revolution of the 4th September, he became President of the Government of National Defence - in addition to his other offices. His much-touted "*Plan*" for defending the city raised expectations which were doomed to disappointment. Successive sorties, made only under the pressure of public opinion, were unsuccessful and (having declared in one of his proclamations that the Governor of Paris would never capitulate) when capitulation became inevitable he resigned the Governorship of Paris on the 22nd of January 1871 to General Vinoy, retaining the Presidency of the Government until after the armistice in February. After the Commune he was elected to the National Assembly by eight departments, and sat for Morbihan. In October 1871 he was elected President of the Council General for Morbihan. In July 1872 he retired from political life, and in 1873 from the army.

Thanks to M. Patrick Brunet-Moret of the Musée Trochu in Belle-Île-en-Mer, I have a copy of: - "*Un Méconnu : General Trochu (1815-1896) - D'Après Des Documents Inédits*" ("*An Unrecognised Man*": *General Trochu: According to Unpublished Documents.*", by "*Vital Cartier*", published by Perrin et Cie in 1913. ("*Vital Cartier*" was Charles Blanchet -Trochu's estranged nephew). From pp 98-100, I translate as follows:-

"On the Battle of Balaklava, fatal to the English cavalry, I find notes which provoke intense emotion sixty years after the event. The Russian general Liprandi, on the morning of the 25th of October, had - without difficulty - expelled the occupying Turks from the redoubts which barred the valley of Balaklava. At the sound of the cannon, the French and English camps (at the siege) had put themselves under arms waiting for orders, and in the morning (from 8 to 9 o'clock I think) the two chief generals with their staffs were grouped on the high summits - abrupt in this place - which border the valley ¹. I was with Lord Raglan, and a few paces behind him was the English Captain Nolan, an ardent officer and a good fellow whom we all liked. We had before our eyes the following scene:

1. Immediately below us, very close it seemed, but very far away by the zig-zag path ² leading to it, was the bulk of the English cavalry under Lord Lucan's command and, in particular, all of the Light Cavalry under the direct orders of Lord Cardigan.
2. On the right, far off in the plain, between the port of Balaklava and the redoubts, were the stationary Scots Greys (admirably-mounted Heavy Cavalry), about 300 horses. [*Trochu does not mention the other regiments of the British Heavy Cavalry.*]
3. Between the abandoned redoubts and off to the side, six Turkish battalions. ³ [*Trochu does not mention the 93rd Highlanders or the "Thin Red Line".*]
4. A long line of Russian infantry and artillery, bordering the foot of the heights facing those where we were, its left leaning against the furthest redoubt ⁴, its right more than four kilometers

from us ⁵, the whole force evaluated by us at 20 or 25,000 men. ⁶

5. A large group of Russian cavalry, a brigade, I think, charging towards Balaklava, right towards the Scots Grays, who remained immobile and did not seem to perceive the storm which threatened them. Some Russian squadrons, detached from the main group, rode towards the struck tents lying on the ground where Lord Lucan's cavalry had encamped, who also remained motionless and appeared to see nothing. (I believe that in fact they saw nothing, the undulations of the valley robbing them of the striking picture of which, from our high observatory, we could see the whole and all the details).

Our hearts were leaping, "My Lord," said I to Lord Raglan, with indignant emotion which I could not master, "the Scots are going to be eaten up, and your cavalry, which could overwhelm the enemy with a charge in reverse, does not assist them!" "Yes, yes, I see," said Lord Raglan (we all had the same thoughts), and dictated to his Chief of General Staff (General Airey) a short note which Captain Nolan, no less animated than we all were, unfortunately, left at a gallop and took to Lord Lucan. ⁷ [*The present text accords very well with my previous evidence (accounts by Portal and Doyle presented in "Nolan at Balaklava Part IV" (This Journal, 24(4), 15-21, 2007) that Nolan carried an order to retake the Redoubt guns **BEFORE** the events of "The Thin Red Line" and the "Charge of the Heavy Brigade"]*.

It took him perhaps three-quarters of an hour to reach him by the zig-zags ⁸, and during this time an unexpected feat of arms (not for those who, coolly judging, know the effort which can be produced in an instant, given an English troop) was performed under our delighted eyes. The Scots, awaiting their adversaries, received them by a short-range charge, and, methodically unsettling them, with invincible resolution penetrated their mass, into which they disappeared for a moment to reappear at the other side. In my life, I had not seen that before. In my life, I have not seen it again. The Russian cavalry, in full rout, ran to the shelter of the redoubts, and did not reappear. ⁹

When Captain Nolan, full of his duty, was with Lord Lucan, he commanded him (as I have heard from the English officers) to obey the orders given, and nothing more of the circumstances which had motivated them: nothing but a few wretched Turkish cannons ¹⁰ dragged out of the redoubts by the Russians. The success of the prescribed movement (under conditions that no longer existed) would have led to their recapture, for the English infantry and ours were in motion and, united to the cavalry which had remained intact, they could have, before the end of the day, effected (at least) this rescue - of very moderate interest.

The event which followed was the result of a deplorable destiny. It gave us the painfully admirable spectacle of a few hundred English horsemen, charging a whole army along a defile, of which batteries of cannon and infantry battalions formed the sides. It was a destruction in which the brave and unhappy Nolan perished who, bearer of the fatal order, had wanted to be one of its executors. ¹¹ His was perhaps a prejudiced head, but he had a great heart."

Trochu certainly attended Canrobert among the command group on the Sapoune Heights. My extracts from Hugh Henry Rose' Journal (**This Journal**, 24(3), 20-25, 2006) include "*Exclamation of Trochu "Why did not other Regiments pursue?" and "Directly afterward Trochu came up "Sais tu, Rose, votre Cavalerie a fait une faute impardonnable! Ils ont chargé contre un feu amère d'Art". "Do you know, Rose, your Cavalry has made an unforgivable mistake! They have charged against bitter artillery fire."*

John Blunt's personal notes in his "Reminiscences" [D. J. Austin: **CWRS SP 33**] state:- "I was present at the delivery of the order, and nothing could have been more disrespectful and offensive than Captain Nolan's attitude towards Lord Lucan when his Lordship objected to execute

it. His Lordship exclaimed attack and where and what guns Sir. Nolan pointed with his sword towards the End of the Valley and cried out 'There My Lord is your enemy and there are your guns.'. The printed record of his 1908 lecture in Malta state:- "As most of the Staff had been sent with orders to the Cavalry Brigades, only the second A.D.C. (Capt. The Hon. Charteris), the Interpreter and an Orderly remained with Lord Lucan, when shortly after Captain Nolan rode up close to his Lordship, saluted and delivered to him a written order from Lord Raglan. After reading the order Lord Lucan had a discussion with Nolan, who, pointing to the Russian position in an excited manner exclaimed vehemently, in the hearing of all present: 'There, my Lord, is your enemy; there are your guns.' His Lordship appeared to be surprised and irritated at the impetuous and disrespectful attitude and tone of Captain Nolan, looked at him sternly but made no answer; and after some hesitation proceeded to give orders to Lord Cardigan to charge the enemy with the Light Brigade and to the Heavy Brigade to advance in support, and at the same time went to accompany the latter."

SUMMARY:

It is very clear (to me) that **Lucan offered Nolan no opportunity** to explain or amplify the fatal 4th Order - **that was Lucan's error**. Nolan did not press any clarification on Lucan - **that was his error**. Those errors were prompted by **Raglan's determined insistence on a tactically needless advance** and **Airey's grossly ambiguous drafting of the 4th Order**. **While all four share the responsibility for "The Charge", the heaviest weight must lie on Raglan.**

¹ Sapun Gora (Sapoune Heights).

² This route was via the Col of Balaklava.

³ John Blunt, Lucan's interpreter, was sent to direct some of the fleeing Turks towards the 93rd Highlanders.

⁴ Redoubt 4, captured, disarmed and abandoned by the Russians.

⁵ Redoubt 1 (Canrobert's Hill).

⁶ This clearly indicates that Trochu and Raglan were positioned near the Col of Balaklava at that time. (The command group moved to the north-east edge of the Heights later in the morning.)

⁷ Several officers were sent down to order just such a manoeuvre, but nothing was done. Captain Robert Portal (4th Light Dragoons), who was in the command group, wrote in his letter to his mother, dated 26 October, 1854 :- *"Well, about an hour afterwards we saw that their Cavalry had formed up in line across a plain, with hills on both sides of it, about a mile from where our Light Cavalry was stationed; a certain Captain Nolan, who is well-known in the army, and who is A.D.C. to General Airey, and who is supposed to be a very dashing Cavalry officer, came up to Lord Lucan and said that the General desired the Light Cavalry would attack to their front at once. Lord Lucan and Lord Cardigan said: it seems madness to attack at such a distance without sufficient support of Infantry and Artillery, and we don't know what they may have stationed among the trees on the sides of those hills."* However, Nolan came back shortly afterwards with a written order, which he gave to Lord Lucan, that the Light Cavalry were to attack." I take this as clear evidence that Nolan delivered two orders, not just one. That first order, sent before 10 a.m., has not survived in manuscript.

- ⁸ Nolan went via the Col of Balaklava with this first order. On his return by that route, he met Captain George Higginson of the Grenadier Guards, who recalled that Nolan - much excited - was apparently in search of Estcourt, the Adjutant-General. Nolan carried the second order (the written 4th Order) directly down the face of the Sapun Gora at or just before 11 a.m.
- ⁹ The defeated Russian cavalry re-crossed the Causeway Heights near Redoubt 4 and re-assembled at the eastern end of the North Valley.
- ¹⁰ These were British iron 12-pounders. This part of Trochu's text clearly relates to Nolan's delivery (without explanation) of Raglan's verbal order and the written 4th Order, shortly after 11 a.m. **Lucan failed to interrogate Nolan, who was not allowed to clarify matters.**
- ¹¹ Nolan may have been authorised or instructed to guide the Light Brigade. He did join them and attempted to divert at least the 17th Lancers towards the Causeway Heights.